

The [New York Times](#) wrote an excellent editorial today on the importance of the 2010 Census.

From the [NYT](#):

In mid-March, the Census Bureau will mail census forms to the nation's 134 million households. With 10 questions, the form is one of the shortest in the history of the decennial count, dating back to 1790. But will people fill it out and mail it back? They should.

As civic duties go, filling out the 2010 census will certainly be less demanding than, say, filing a tax return or serving on a jury. Yet, the census has detractors — including several vocal conservative pundits and some Republican lawmakers who depict it as an unwarranted government intrusion. That is a distortion of its history, intent and use...

When the founding fathers established the census in the Constitution, their revolutionary aim was to ensure that the people have a fair voice in their government, by counting everyone and using the results to determine the number of representatives from each state.

The census is also used to allocate federal aid to the states and to draw electoral districts. An accurate count makes sure that federal dollars are distributed fairly and that electoral boundaries reflect the population. If the census is skewed, so are those government functions.

Another baseless criticism of the census is that it is unconstitutional to ask anything beyond the number of people living in a residence. Numerous federal and Supreme Court cases have upheld the constitutionality of collecting additional information in the census, provided it is relevant and necessary to good government.

To that end, questions about age, gender, race, Hispanic ethnicity and homeownership are used to help execute and monitor laws and programs that are targeted to specific groups. That is not to downplay legitimate debate fueled by questions that go beyond who is living where. Counting people by race and ethnicity, for example, is useful for enforcing civil rights laws, like

the Voting Rights Act. But it also provokes argument about identity and equality in a diverse society.

The most important thing to know is that, fundamentally, the census is about building and rebuilding a representative democracy where divisive issues can be constructively debated. When your census form arrives, fill it out and send it back. Your country will thank you.

Ensuring a fair and accurate count is a top priority for the Oversight Committee and [several hearings have been held](#) to examine the 2010 Census. [Click here](#) to read the editorial in its entirety.